

FIAT 500L TREKKING

By Jim Mc Cauley

Fiat has retained the 500 badge for what is now an extended family long distanced from the original model that carried it in the 1950s. The 500L Trekking is the roomier 5-seater member with sophisticated traction electronics that enables it to take a serious charge at difficult terrain.



The new model has Italian design written all over it in a bodyshell whose lines distract from its overall bulk and add a degree of elegance to its practicality. The Trekking derivative is further distinguished by new bumpers and wheelarches, as well as larger wheels fitted with 'Mud and Snow' tyres and 10% more ground clearance, taking it to 145 mm. Reason for the Trekking badge is Fiat's 'Traction+' system which moves torque from a spinning front wheel to the gripping wheel in order to maintain maximum adhesion. The Trekking also receives other handling upgrades as standard.

Engine choice is from a selection of four power units, two petrol and two diesel with the test choice the top 1.6 litre MultiJet turbo diesel, outputting 105HP at 3,750 rpm and unlike the smaller 1.3 litre diesel, steps up an extra ratio to a 6-speed manual gearbox. This provides the quickest off the mark statistics, reaching the benchmark 62 mph in 12 seconds with the potential to top out at 109 mph.

On road, and the car is a smooth and willing performer with the 6-speed gearbox offering slick changes to maintain fluid pace. With a higher seating position and wishbone 'A' pillars splitting the traditional heavy single post into two thinner ones, all-round visibility is excellent, and with a relatively vertical rear end reversing proves a very simple operation, aided by the standard rear parking sensors.

The electric power steering provides good feel and being equipped with the company's 'Dualdrive' system offers a one-touch option to increase power assistance, particularly useful when manoeuvring in tight spaces. In addition to the Traction+ system in the Trekking, there is a further

range of handling / safety packages that includes the first standard provision in a Fiat of City Brake Control. This uses a laser sensor to detect a potential frontal collision at low speeds and if there is no intervention from the driver, it will automatically apply the brakes to stop the car. It operates at speeds between 3 and 19 mph in order to avoid activation during low speed parking or at higher speeds when it could create a dangerous scenario.



Supporting safety provision includes Electronic Stability Control as standard as well as Brake Assist and PreFill which recognise emergency situations and increase the brake pedal's response to achieve quicker braking in critical situations. A further benefit is the Hill Holder function which prevents roll-back when taking off on a hill if the handbrake is released too early.

Cabin accommodation in the 500L Trekking is generous with a supporting 400 litre boot, while interior design reflects the youthful appeal of the exterior. Circular analogue dials clearly present the necessary information with a digital display screen between the speedometer and rev counter. The lower end of the centre stack contains the air conditioning controls while the upper end features a 5-inch touchscreen for radio and Bluetooth control. The interior of the Trekking is also differentiated from that of the standard 500L with distinctive colour combinations.

Boot access is via a wide opening rear tailgate and a one-touch operation will fold and tumble the rear seats to provide an extended flat load bay. With the folding front passenger seat, the vehicle can accommodate loads of up to 2.4 metres in length.

Fiat is making a serious bid with the 500L in all its variants, and in addition to the Traction+ system in the Trekking and supporting handling technologies, the vehicle also comes comprehensively equipped with six airbags, rear parking sensors, cruise control, fixed glass sunroof, automatic dual zone climate control and automatic operation of lights and wipers.

Fiat see an almost even split in the market for the vehicle with fleet sales at 52% just pipping the retail sector at 48%. They also hope to widen their horizons with an envisaged 70% conquest sales and a 62% bias towards female buyers with sales in the region of 12-14,000 in a full year.

The 1.6 litre turbo diesel with 6-speed manual gearbox has a given combined fuel consumption of 62.8 mpg, and with a CO2 emissions of 117 gms/km is in Band C for annual road tax of £30. The top

range model tested with a 5-star EuroNCAP safety rating is priced at £18,890 and is in Group 18 of the ABI's (1-50) listings for insurance purposes.

Among the available options are heated front windscreen at £350, digital radio upgrade at £100, and two-tone paint at £850. For those who like their sustenance on the move, the vehicle can be fitted with a specially developed Lavazza coffee machine for £200.